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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAKAR 001169

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PARIS FOR POL - D'ELIA

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [SG](#)  
SUBJECT: INFANTICIDE IN SENEGAL

REF: 05 DAKAR 03019

Classified By: DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

#### SUMMARY

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11. (U) Senegalese are appalled at increasing media reports of infanticide. Though the practice seems to be limited, actual statistics are shaky. Factors which might lead parents to resort to the practice include poverty, emigration of the father, incest, the Islamic practices of polygamy and expeditious divorce by the husband, and the lack of a systematic structure to assist pregnant women and place children for adoption. END SUMMARY.

#### MEDIA REPORTS OF INFANTICIDE

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12. (U) We have reported previously on police reports of infanticide among wives whose husbands are long-time emigrants (Reftel). Recently, the media have reported on other cases. In January, one woman from an area just outside Dakar strangled the baby she had given birth to the week before, saying she did not want a child born outside of marriage. The following month, a woman from a rural community near the Guinean border gave birth to a boy, whom she killed and buried in some bushes. The woman was married to someone who had emigrated six years before.

13. (U) In each case, the police were alerted and the women arrested. In fact, according to Nafissatou Diouf Mbodj of the National Association of Women Lawyers, there has been at least one such case in the courts of each region every year for the past five years. However, Mbodj added that many cases never get reported, making the statistics unreliable. She said when cases do make it into the courts, judges often soften the punishment when they determine that a mother was suffering from extreme hardship. The flip side of this problem is that some women end up in prison for years, and the fathers of their children never get prosecuted.

#### ROOT CAUSES

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14. (U) Mbodj felt the most common cause of infanticide is poverty. Yet, many instances are caused by husbands effectively abandoning their wives, either by emigrating or by acquiring additional wives, as permitted under Islam. In her perspective, this made the problem more serious in areas such as Kaolack and Tambacounda, crossroads for people going back and forth between Senegal and its neighboring countries, as well as in the Islamic communities of Touba and Kolda. She said incest is another cause and is very common. Unfortunately, incest is never spoken of outside of families. Again, there are no reliable statistics.

#### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

¶5. (C) Ndeye Lissa Diop Ndiaye, in charge of child protection for the Ministry of Women, Families and Social Development, told us a comprehensive study and awareness campaign are needed. According to her, though, organizations such as her own tend to get seized by one theme and ignore other issues. Currently, so many groups have asked her Ministry to partner in efforts to combat trafficking in persons that, she contends, the Ministry has not been able to focus on other critical areas.

¶6. (U) Marie Louise Mbodj, also of the National Association of Women Lawyers, brought up the issue of lack of shelters for pregnant women or of a system to permit women to anonymously leave children at orphanages or hospitals. Senegal is a signatory to the International Adoption Convention but, according to Marie Louise, needs to tighten adoption policies, more strictly regulating who can adopt and how.

COMMENT

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¶7. (U) Whatever the causes of this problem and - despite weak statistics - no matter how unusual, the results are tragic. Not only is there a loss of life, but the women often give birth alone and use broken bottles to cut the umbilical cord, causing infection and, frequently, sterility. They also suffer from psychological problems. This is an issue that will require behavioral change, as Ndiaye indicated, and a more vigorous commitment from the GOS would help. END COMMENT.  
JACOBS